

Introduction

American Indians today lay claim to a cultural heritage that includes a rich diversity of spiritual traditions. Despite the misconceptions of early explorers, missionaries, and government agents who were unable to appreciate or to comprehend the subtleties and complexities of these traditions, every Indian group they encountered had some expression of what is referred to in the West as religion. The degree of variation between tribal traditions that still exists makes it difficult to generalize over such a wide range of religious understandings and practices. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to point out that many American Indian cultures (and tribal cultures in general) rely on a worldview that is more holistic in character, when compared with the Cartesian dualism prevalent in post-Enlightenment European cultures. The predominant Western conception of reality in terms of dualistic oppositions (ideas vs. matter, spiritual vs. physical, good vs. evil) and discrete categories of phenomena (religion, politics, biology, art, etc.) represent false distinctions in the view of many Indian people. The Western academic tradition has pursued an increasingly atomistic approach to the analysis of social phenomena, and while the current interest in inter-disciplinary methodologies (which represents a short-term reversal of a centuries-long trend) is an encouraging

sign, it may not be enough to overcome what is a cross-cultural problem. Furthermore, the diversification and synthesis of human knowledge that results from the dialectic of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary studies may lead to a more thorough interpretation of empirical data, but the overall process does not address the materialist philosophy which forms the basis for modern social scientific investigation. If Western scholars wish to understand American Indians with a truly emic perspective, it may mean both new scientific methodologies and new philosophical presuppositions.

The European invasion of the Americas during the past five hundred years has been a traumatic experience for American Indian societies, to say the least. The process of land dispossession, population destruction, and colonial occupation has been a long and tortuous one; methods of subjugation have changed over time, but the process has continued into the present period. Indian response to this history of oppression has included adaptation and accommodation as well as opposition and resistance, and has taken a variety of forms. Some Indian groups have exerted economic influence by controlling trade and natural resources, while others have manipulated the political objectives of colonial powers in order to serve their own interests. Still others have proposed diplomatic initiatives in order to resolve disputed situations and,

when these efforts failed, have resorted to military confrontation in the defense of territories and communities. In recent times Indians have pursued legal avenues as a means to redressing past injustices and ending continued repression, and have taken to the streets in social protest when no other course of action seemed practical. Though Indian response has been diverse and multi-dimensional, many of these organized, deliberate efforts at social change have been initiated, motivated, and guided by religious factors.

Movements of cultural and religious revitalization have also been an important feature of this history of oppression and resistance. Anthropologists and historians have documented hundreds of such movements, and many more were undoubtedly suppressed by over-zealous missionaries and over-anxious agents, who often misunderstood the peaceful intentions of many of these movements and censored them just as southern whites quieted slave rebellions for fear of a widespread uprising. These movements are commonly referred to as "revitalization movements" after the terminology suggested by Anthony F. C. Wallace. While Wallace's theoretical formulation is concerned more directly with the process of cultural revitalization, it is clear that religious concerns are implicit when applying this method of interpretation to American Indian movements.

The importance of revitalization movements lies in the fact that they continue today as a characteristic of the

Indian experience. These movements take place in the context of the continuing struggle to maintain Indian cultures and to protect them from harmful outside influences. Many Indian people still affirm the value of their spiritual traditions even as they wrestle with the continuing (and often destructive) presence of Christian churches within their communities. This affirmation of value is evident in a variety of modern contexts. Many of the alcohol and drug treatment programs organized in Indian communities during recent years have included a spiritual component as an important dimension of the recovery process. Tribal leaders and elders who are fighting for the protection of sacred lands emphasize these lands' importance for the spiritual life and health of Indian people. And the recent revival of Indian cultures relies on a return to traditional ways as the means to a new sense of dignity and pride in "Indianness."

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Part I of this paper will survey the literature that addresses the study of revitalization movements among American Indians and others. This body of literature is extensive and includes a number of distinct disciplinary perspectives, though Wallace's approach has had widespread influence as a methodological paradigm. One measure of this influence lies in changes in the ways that anthropologists have studied and written about the more general subject of

"primitive" religion. Revitalization movement theory developed out of the comparative study of tribal cultures and has been used cross-culturally; some scholars have applied it to movements arising in African American and Judeo-Christian contexts. The anthropological study of these movements has not been limited to Wallace's formulation, however, and encompasses a long history of theoretical development. In addition, sociologists have developed a variety of theoretical approaches to social movements; this body of sociological theory constitutes a valuable supplement to anthropological theories because many social movements, when considered from an anthropological perspective, constitute revitalization movements.

Part II is a case study of a modern American Indian revitalization movement, the Indian Ecumenical Conference. The nature of this movement makes clear the methodological advantages of employing both anthropological and sociological theories. Anthropological theory is useful here because of its historic development around the study of American Indian societies and because of its primary concern with culture. Sociological theory of social movements is important because of its interest in movements in modern society and its more recent concern with the question of identity, which was a central issue for the Indian Ecumenical Conference. The Indian Ecumenical Conference began during the early seventies and was related to other

events in Indian country during that period in American society. The Conference was well known in Indian country and had effects throughout North America, though it appears that there are still no published studies of the movement. This history of the movement constitutes original research drawing on a variety of primary sources including Indian newspapers, Anglican Church periodicals, and unpublished materials. Part II concludes with an analysis of the movement in light of the theory, suggesting some of the theoretical implications of this case study.